




# Is There A Doctor In The House ?

Rube Goldberg

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in the House?





Is There a Doctor  
In the House  
?

by  
Rube Goldberg

*With illustrations  
by the author*

The John Day Company  
*New York*

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18329

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.  
FOR THE JOHN DAY COMPANY, INC.  
BY THE QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.



Respectfully Dedicated to  
the Doctor Who Blighted My Wife



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# I

## They Ought to Give Ether to Husbands

It was not until recently that I came to the shocking realization of the fact that women were unjustly taking all the glory for their own operations. They became suddenly renowned when they entered the hospital, and during the period of recuperation, which generally was stretched into a ripe old age, they acquired a spiritual glow that enshrined them in a niche alongside Joan of Arc, Edith Cavell and Carrie Nation.

I am here to plead the case of the unsung husband who endures a sympathetic pain for every one of his wife's agonies and alone suffers the full burden of the terrific blow that comes with the doctor's final bill.

My own case is probably mild compared to those of other male martyrs of female operations. But it will serve, I hope, as a document of emancipation for obscure husband bystanders who have not received one single little flower or one soft isolated grape to console them during their period of mental travail and financial torment.

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It was I who suggested that my wife see a specialist. I claim this distinction so I justly can take the credit for all the suffering which I subsequently endured. Suggesting that your wife visit a specialist means nothing more or less than a positive operation.

If a woman book-agent or a solicitor of funds for the hoarse yodlers of the Alps drifts innocently into the consulting-room of a great surgeon he will immediately order her to the hospital to be operated on for oophlitis, which does not have to mean anything at all.

An anatomical consultant need only look at a woman and she is under the ether. When my wife walked into the consulting-room of a famous diagnostician he said, without looking up from his newspaper which was open at the financial page, "Madam, you need an operation."

"But, doctor," my wife protested, "you don't even know who I am and you haven't even examined me yet."

"My good woman," he answered, as his eye rested on the latest quotation for General Motors, "you are very well dressed and that is sufficient reason why you need an operation. As far as your identity is

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concerned I am not the least bit interested. I only want to know who your husband is."

I call your attention to the important part I played in the transaction to counteract future evidence which seemed to point to the contrary. When she came home she told me of the interview and, with mixed emotions, both scrambled and soft-boiled, I called up the great man of medicine and gave him my bank balance.

When I reached his office the next day by appointment, I said, "Now, doctor, while I earn a nice living and am in fairly comfortable circumstances, I am not what you would call a—"

That was as far as I got. He seized me and took my temperature, pulse and blood pressure.

"Say, doctor," I protested, "my wife is the one to be operated on, not I."

"I know it," he answered unemotionally, all the while seemingly engrossed in mental calculations. "I merely wanted to see how much of a shock you could stand."

To my great disappointment he found me to be perfectly normal and thoroughly capable of taking it on the chin. He said quickly, "Have your wife at the hospital Sunday night and I will operate Monday morning at nine-thirty."

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A nurse escorted me to the door in a daze and that was the beginning of a period of silent suffering for which, up to this moment, I have been unable to let out one single squawk of complaint. I ask for no sympathy now. All I want is the glory to which I am entitled.

Sunday night I took my wife to the hospital and met the two nurses who were to sit around for the next three weeks reading the latest novels and tabloids at eight dollars apiece a day. I said good night to the prospective patient, told her not to worry about the children, paid the bill for two weeks in advance, and then ceased to exist as far as the hospital authorities were concerned. After a sleepless night, I reached the hospital at nine and was told I could not enter the sick-room. They were wrapping the patient for mailing to the operating-room.

I stood outside the door hoping I could get a glimpse of the bundle that was once my wife as it passed by en route to its uncertain destination. I stood helplessly by a window overlooking an apartment-house across the street.

I saw a man shaving and a woman cooking corned beef and cabbage. I saw a baby eating clothes-pins, two bootleggers counting bottles and a night-watchman just going to bed. I saw a blonde in a beautiful

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green kimono lying in bed crying over the telephone.

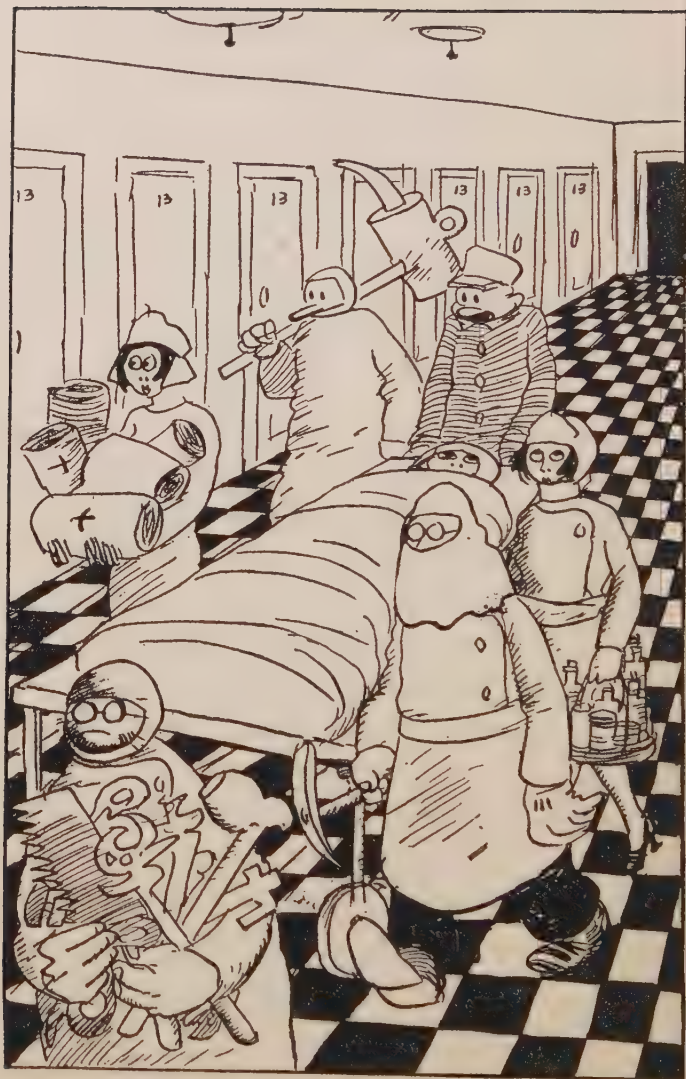
All the while, men and women, clad completely in white, kept rushing past me like ghosts in a Shakespearean tragedy. Once or twice I accosted one of them and asked, "Is everything going all right?"

But to them I was just another ghost. I wanted to be just some small part of the proceedings, but they would have none of me. I talked aloud to myself hoping to attract a little attention. If someone had only said, "That guy is nuts," I would have felt relieved. My unimportance was overwhelming.

Finally I was almost run over by an individual who looked like a street-sweeper. The only thing he lacked was the helmet. He went by so fast I only caught a fleeting glimpse of the vehicle he was wheeling, and mistook it for one of those portable ash-cans.

Had they given up hope already? Had they called in the street-cleaning department to cart my wife away? He pushed his scooter into the room and I was prey to all sorts of mingled phantasmagoria. I imagined what I didn't see and misjudged what I did see.

Soon the wheeled affair reappeared and was rolled down the hall accompanied by a Ku Klux parade. They all marched in perfect order, their heads en-



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cased in spotless white flour sacks. My wife was queen of the carnival and rode aloft in the wheeled chariot. But she vouchsafed no sign of recognition to the assembled crowd of one, which happened to be me.

I remembered dimly the doctor had told me the operation might take an hour and a half. I looked at my watch and figured it would be over by eleven at the very latest. I was struck with a brilliant idea. My car was waiting downstairs. I would drive around town with my chauffeur for an hour and get my mind off the operation. That ride was like one of those futuristic novels the technique of which alone can convey any idea of my state of mind.

"Well, Joe, they've got her up there at last. Suppose the surgeon forgets which case it is and takes out the wrong thing! Gee, look at that fellow's whiskers. Wonder what he does when he goes to the dentist. Let's go and take a look at the new span they put in High Bridge. Suppose something happens, who will run the house? I could hire somebody to do the ordering all right, but I don't even know what size stockings the children wear . . .

"An operation is an ordinary thing these days, but, after all, when you are dealing with human life there is always a certain element of danger.



I would drive around town for an hour and get my mind off the operation.

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"Darn my tailor. He's altered this coat three times and it's still tight under the arms . . . The poor kid, lying up there with a lot of strange butchers practicing new carving strokes on her. Maybe she didn't need the operation after all. It's all my fault, anyway.

"Do I send flowers the first day? Does a husband put in a card? I've got a little pain in my right side myself. Maybe the doctor would have given me a wholesale rate for two operations . . . I wonder what General Electric is doing to-day. It wouldn't look right for me to call up my broker now. Still, I'd like to know . . .

"Gee, they're wearing their skirts short. The one that just passed is a beaut. There's a lot of room in the car, too . . . I had a friend whose wife was operated on. The doctors got into a discussion about a bridge hand and forgot to sew her up.

"Gosh, I wonder what they're doing to her now! Will she come out of the ether all right?

"Sure, Joe, I'd love to see your new apartment. It will use up a little time. Only forty-five a month. That includes taking away the garbage. Go ahead, I'm not listening to a word you're saying. You certainly keep the kitchen clean, Mrs. Joe . . . No, I

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didn't mind walking up the six flights of stairs . . . It nearly killed me and I didn't want to see the apartment in the first place . . .

"I must get back to the hospital now. Maybe something's happened. Gee, the car is crawling. That's a good picture of Johnny Farrell on that sign-board. 'I find that a drink of Gulpo gives me the proper zip when I hit the ball.' Boloney! Look at that cop, standing there arguing with a guy for passing an empty trolley-car and six murders probably being committed half a block away . . .

"Maybe I should have put in an order to sell my General Electric, anyway. I wish that couple in the car ahead would stop necking. It makes me nervous. Still, maybe it's the only chance he gets. His wife won't let him get out nights . . .

"A doctor can't work with a steady hand every day. Maybe this is one of the days when he's not in form. More speed, Joe.

"One hundred and tenth . . . One hundred and ninth . . . One hundred and eighth . . . One hun— Ah, thank heaven, the hospital is still here, anyway. Wait!"

When I walked back into the hospital no one looked at me sympathetically and said, "That is the poor fellow whose wife is being operated on." No

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one even noticed me. The girl clerks went on checking up tonsils and adenoids. I slumped into the elevator, whispered, "Fourth floor, please," and the elevator boy did nothing but take me to the fourth floor.

The fourth floor was as silent as a tomb. I staggered to my wife's room. It was still empty. Her hat and bag were lying on a chair. I thought, "Will she ever use them again?" I picked up a paper lying on the floor and read, "Man kills wife in drunken rage." Between booze and doctors, wives had no chance at all. I waited and listened.

There was an electric loud-speaker in the hall that was apparently out there to summon doctors and nurses to other parts of the building. The thing kept belching strange, inarticulate noises. When it said, "Doctor Scrams is ploov woff urk," I imagined it meant, "Send twelve more doctors to the operating-room. Everything has gone wrong."

Every time I heard a footstep in the hall I thought it was a white-robed messenger coming to tell me that I could give one of the nurses my wife's hat and bag. She wouldn't need them any more. And I had to fight this battle all alone!

I was practically in a state of delirium when at eleven-fifteen they wheeled a white mass back into



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the room. In my befuddled state I gazed at the mummylike figure and asked, "Have they found King Tut's brother?" I don't know how long my unsettled condition lasted. When my brain cleared up, I was seated in a corner where I probably had been swept and a nurse was bending over me saying, "Everything is just fine."

I think it is cruelly unfair to give a wife a painless operation and let her husband do all the suffering. He should be given ether, too. The party is one-sided unless the anesthetist passes around the ether in the form of a loving-cup.

But my period of martyrdom had really only just begun. At six o'clock that night, when I was told that my wife had come out of the ether, I said to myself, "Well, old boy, here's where you step into the picture and command the respect due a person of importance. There will be many important things to attend to and you must handle your end of the case with fine intelligent acumen." I figured out in my mind the exact words of the opening speech I would make when I entered the sick-room.

When I entered the sick-room, sure enough my wife was out of the ether. But she was also out of sympathy with any views I had to express regarding the latest achievement in the art of surgery. She gave



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me a forlorn look that seemed to indicate that I was using up space in the room that could be occupied more advantageously by someone who was officially connected with the case.

The nurse was doing a juggling act with gauze, queer-shaped bottles, pillows and adhesive and adjusting the bed with a small crank attached to the dashboard. The bed was really a mechanical marvel that could be changed alternately with a few turns of a crank into a steamer chair, a stretcher, a chaise longue, a flat-bottomed boat and a pool-table.

The room was small, but it seemed to get smaller the longer I stood there. I finally said "Good-by" without getting any reply from either the patient or the nurse. As I slunk down the hall like a person who had just been blackballed in the lodge, who should I see coming my way but the doctor who performed the operation! At last I could get into the picture.

I threw my shoulders back so he would not suspect the crushed state of my soul. But he walked right past me without the slightest sign of recognition. I called after him, "Hey, doctor, I'm the husband of the lady you just operated on." As soon as the words were out of my mouth I felt they sounded strangely humorous like, "Who was the lady I seen

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you with?" or "I'm the guy that just came in," or "It must have been two other fellows."

But I had no more to lose. I was beyond insult by this time. I ran after the great man of science, grabbed him by the arm and said with forced nonchalance, "Well, doc, is she all right now? Is everything just as you expected?"

He looked at me in an impersonal way and answered, "Well, I must admit it was even a surprise to an old-timer like myself. I hadn't the slightest suspicion it was going to be twins. You are the father of two beautiful girls."

He started away and I gurgled, "But my wife was operated on for appendicitis!"

He burst out laughing, the first sign of emotion since he looked up my bank balance.

"Pardon me. You said you were the husband of the lady I just operated on. That was confusing. Now I remember your face. I have operated on seven other women since your wife was taken off the table."

Just imagine! He had them cleared off the table like a lot of dirty dishes to make way for the next course! And my wife was only an entrée in his surgical meal!

However, I would not give up. I questioned him again and he said with a sigh of impatience, "I have



"I have only a minute. If you have a pencil and a piece of paper I will draw you a diagram of the whole condition as I found it."

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only a minute. But if you have a pencil and a piece of paper I will draw you a diagram of the whole condition as I found it."

He even made me furnish the pencil and paper. But I was satisfied because I was at least getting somewhere. He quickly drew a sketch on the back of the envelope. To me it was a fine map of a new real estate development. When he had finished his work of art he explained it in terms that sounded something like this:

"Your wife really had a remarkable condition. The magoozlum valves were all crowded around the appendix, causing adhesions which affected the screeves duct and completely shut off the woff. This pressed up against the immik gland and twisted the gadget around forty-five degrees, filling the goofle with carbon and causing a slight infection of the yonkle. It was a clear case of ovis poli."

"But, doctor," I said, wondering whether he intended having the drawing framed at my expense, "what is that round thing with the mark on it that makes it look like the number six ball?"

"Oh, don't bother about that," he answered, "I took that out."

"And what is that oblong thing with the bay window in it?"

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"I took that out, too."

"And how about that barn over there and that bunker here, and that hedge there and all those artichokes lined up in the corner?"

"I thought I might as well take those out, too, as long as I was at it."

From what I could gather he hadn't overlooked a thing. He was simply a cutting fool and there was I with a hollow wife on my hands. On stormy nights the wind would whistle through her with a sad, sad moan, and the children would think she was haunted. To put it mildly, my domestic outlook was comparatively empty.

The nurse told me not to bring flowers for a few days, but she did say I could bring a soft pillow from the house, and the radio and a dozen grapefruit and a few bottles of Castoria and some alcohol and a folding card-table and eight or ten other minor things. For several days when people saw me walking along the street they thought I was a pack-mule that had strayed from the desert.

And all the time I was dying to bring flowers. There seemed to me to be a touch of romance hidden somewhere beneath this strangely confusing affair, and I craved to express it with something beautiful and fragrant and sweet.





There I was with a hollow wife on my hands. On stormy nights the wind would whistle through her with a sad, sad moan, and the children would think she was haunted,



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When I finally did select a box of roses with the utmost care and carried them triumphantly into the sick-room, I found that all of my wife's friends had beaten me to it. The room was filled with candy hats loaded with gardenias. Vases longer than golf bags were bursting with American beauties, and carnations oozed out of fancy urns and bowls. My two dollars' worth of flowers looked like the parsley you push off the plate after the chops are served.

I was to endure still more mental anguish. When visitors were allowed I sank deeper into the realm of unimportance. I would dash up to the hospital full of good news about the children, myself and my work, only to find the room crowded with women talking about their own operations.

There was not a woman who called on my wife who did not have the same thing—only worse. She was on the operating-table for an hour and a half and all the others were on the table for two hours and up. She came out of the ether about six hours after the operation and all the others were under it for a week. The doctor said her case was unusual, but each of the female visitors had a case that was unheard-of in the annals of surgery. Each said her case was really a miracle.

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One friend dug up an operation she had twenty years ago and displayed a remarkable memory for details. She told about her last words before going under the ether and the color of the doctor's eyes, and listed every pain she had in all its thrilling details. She even described the paper on the wall of the operating-room. The way she hung on to that ancient operation was actually pathetic. It seemed to be her only friend.

And if the doctors only could hear the way their ex-patients praised them they would blush with embarrassment. Everyone had the finest doctor in the world. So gentle, so smart, so skillful, so wonderful—and so fair when it came to the bill!

Of course, there was a slight infection in the wound that kept one of the girls in bed for a few extra months; and another had to have her operation done over again because the doctor dropped dead right in the middle of his work; and still another's husband had to hire six lawyers to fight the doctor's bill; and one more discovered six years later that the doctor didn't operate at all. He simply put her under the ether and collected his money. From her rambling conversation, it was safe to conclude that she was telling the truth. She was still under the ether.

I have figured out a list of unanswerable boasts

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in connection with my wife's operation. Of course, they are not true. But why consider veracity when we get together and try to outdo one another? I consider the following items almost impossible to top for conversational purposes:

My wife was on the operating-table three days. She was operated upon on the Fourth of July and did not come out of the ether till Christmas.

Her case was the only one in which the big toe on her left foot pierced her appendix, causing acute inflammation of the ear-drum.

When her case was reported at the universities in Germany a whole shipload of eminent surgeons came over here to get first-hand information.

Sixty-three books have been written about her case.

She had the two best nurses in the world. They were so devoted neither of them took a wink of sleep during the whole six months she was under the ether.

She got more flowers than any patient in the hospital in sixty-eight years. Four florists became millionaires during the first week of her convalescence.

She had the best room in the hospital. In fact, they built a special wing for her and ordered sunshine day and night.

Her doctor was the greatest specialist in the world,

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in all forty-seven different things for which she was operated on.

He was so pleased to have my wife for a patient he not only didn't charge me a cent, but he sent me a check for \$4000, two cars and a season pass to the operating-room.

I will not tell the actual truth about the final bill when it really came. It is too harrowing. My wife had not been home from the hospital for more than five minutes when the letter-man arrived with the bill. I had just enough strength left to stagger to the writing-desk and make out a check. Then I fell into a swoon from which I did not recover until I heard a familiar voice near me, saying, "It looks pretty bad. Guess we'll have to operate."

That brought me out of it. I would have no more to do with operations if I had to die to prevent it.



My wife and I had not been home from the hospital more than five minutes when the letter man arrived with the bill,

## II

### What You Need is Exercise

EVERY time I start telling one of my friends about my ailments he breaks in with a long harrowing account of his own afflictions and spoils my story before I really have had a chance to lay bare the intricate workings of my interesting insides. So I decided to negotiate an anatomical debauch in a medium where nobody could bust in at the wrong place and exclaim: "Why, I had exactly the same thing." I'll have my say right now and when this book is tucked away in moth balls I'll be very glad to meet you some time and listen attentively while you describe all the personal charms of your pituitary gland or what have you. But now it is my turn so you may as well listen good-naturedly.

I woke up one night with a peculiar gagging sensation. When I say gagging I do not mean gagging in the humorous sense. I felt like I imagine a horse thief feels when he is being hung. I could not get any air into my lungs. My heart started to thump like a riveting machine and I thought it was about time I awakened my wife to tell her where



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all the securities were hidden in case she became a widow. She summoned a doctor who listened to my chest. He shifted his stethoscope around quite a bit. He probably didn't like the program. He wrapped an inner tube around my arm and took my blood pressure. There were no leaks. He thumped me all over with a tack hammer and found no loose boards. So he advised me to see a specialist.

"What sort of a specialist?" I asked, somewhat surprised to find that I was still alive.

"Oh, just a specialist," he replied, "heart, gland, nerve, or any other kind you may select. All specialists like to be seen."

Feeling that my breathing was in jeopardy and knowing that if one doesn't breathe one loses interest in talking movies and stock profits and good-looking girls and pitch shots to the green, I decided to visit all the specialists in a row.

First I went to the best gland specialist in town. He asked me all about myself and my family, and I told him I liked almost any sort of hash and couldn't understand whiskers, and once broke my thumb on an automobile door. Not to hold out anything on him, I added that my youngest son had a nervous stomach and could not eat much breakfast on school days because he so keenly felt the respon-



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sibility of his studies. He said he would make a lengthy written report on my case to my own doctor. I paid him one hundred and fifty dollars. He sent the written report to the wrong address and when my own doctor finally received it he read with great surprise that I had a nervous stomach and could not eat any breakfast in the morning. The specialist had sent my own doctor an account of what I had told him only he got it wrong. He added very profoundly that the whatsis gland in my neck was enlarged and gave me some medicine to take every two hours. He reached the conclusion about the enlarged gland by discovering that my shirt was a bit tight around the neck. Personally, I thought the tightness might have been due to the natural shrinkage that takes place after thirty or forty washings.

I next visited a psychoanalyst. He was a noted Viennese who was visiting this country on a lecture tour. Without looking at me he told me I allowed myself to become unduly aggravated by people around me whose peculiarities I sensed too quickly. He said, "If there is something wrong with other people it is their own cause for worry, not yours. Don't let little things bother you. Don't look for weaknesses in other people. Ignore them. If you think you are better than other people don't try to

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prove it all the time. They'll find it out." Then he asked me for thirty dollars. This was very cheap and I gave it to him gladly. I did not know what this had to do with my difficulty in breathing. But he was a smart man and had to get money for his passage back to Vienna.

Before I left I really did ask him what all that had to do with my breathing. "Very simple," he said, "you are in a highly nervous state and you are swallowing air. Don't swallow any more air."

That was a hot one. Without knowing it I could go to a jazz concert and swallow a full meal consisting of "Button Up Your Overcoat," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby," and "Ramonita." I was getting the air into my stomach instead of my lungs. I didn't even have to chew it. It was convenient but not nourishing. That is all I could find out. He simply left me with the thought that air was a very injurious diet except in the case of balloons and bagpipes.

So I continued on my round of specialists. I underwent a metabolism test. I went early in the morning before breakfast and breathed into a hose that appeared to be attached to a small aquarium. My metabolism seemed rather important so I looked it up in the dictionary. It concerns "the chemical changes

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proceeding continually in living cells, by which the energy is provided for the vital processes and activities and new material is assimilated to repair the waste." I had enough worries without trying to figure this out. I only hope that the fish survived.

I went to another specialist who stood me in front of a fluoroscope and looked for lost treasures. This test I was sure would be negative because the Viennese professor had assured me that I had nothing more solid on my insides than air.

I kept the heart specialist for the last because I feared that my pulmonary organ was really the seat of all my trouble. I wanted to postpone the worst. He first tested my reflexes. You had it done in the army. They let you sit down and then tap your leg with a small mallet just below the knee. Your foot is supposed to fly out if you are normal. I was more than normal. I kicked the great specialist's assistant in the pants and booted over a pile of magazines that had not been disturbed since the sinking of the Maine, uncovering a patient who had died three years before while waiting to be announced.

Then he asked me the same intimate questions about myself which had been shot at me by the other specialists whose families I was helping to support in the luxurious manner to which they were



I kicked the specialist's assistant in the pants and booted over a pile of magazines that had not been disturbed since the sinking of the Maine.

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accustomed. Shakespeare or the Bible or Senator Borah said "Know thyself." I was certainly getting acquainted with myself with a vengeance. I was getting to know myself so well I was getting a bit bored by the enforced companionship. I knew every word I was about to utter. I was beginning to wish that I could look in the mirror and see another face. The worst part of it was that no matter how jumpy I felt they said there was nothing serious the matter with me. I felt like a Ford. I knew I'd keep going no matter how many leaks I had in my radiator or how often my engine back-fired. It was merely a case of replacing a broken part or two. But no one seemed to know which part.

"Have you ever been athletic?" the heart specialist asked me.

"Not exactly," I answered. "The only real exercise I ever got was lifting an occasional glass of beer or working my neck back and forth trying to get away from a protruding collar button. You see I am an artist and I don't have any heavy tools to handle."

The great man bowed his head in deep thought. He needed time. He must have all the facts. I must tell him everything. "Oh, yes," I suddenly remembered, "I play an occasional game of golf. But I would not call that any form of athletics. You see,

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the only energy I expend in the game is walking from the first tee to a sand trap where I generally remain for the rest of the day."

"I have it," he said very profoundly, "what you need is exercise. Go to a good gymnasium three or four times a week and go through a systematic course of muscle and bone-loosening. Get the rust out of your system. Fifty dollars, please."

Fortunately an artist friend of mine had been frequenting one of the most reputable gymnasiums in New York and recommended it very highly. This simplified matters for me. He introduced me to the gentleman who was the guiding spirit of the enterprise. He was an ex-fighter who had taken up the case of the tired business man in a big way. With the talking movies crowding out the big undraped theatrical revues which used to give the tired business man his only form of uncommercial exhilaration there was nothing left for the tired business man to do but exercise in the afternoon and get so tired he didn't feel like doing anything in the evening.

The gymnasium was really a beautiful place. It did not have the smell with which I had associated all gymnasiums during my long association with prize fighters in their native lairs. Everything was orderly and quiet and gentlemanly. All the customers



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wore the same neat white sweat shirts and trunks, and the attendants had that fine white immaculate antiseptic look you generally associate with hospital attendants and soda jerkers. There was not a cauliflower ear in the place, nor was there any unnecessary exposure of the anatomical bumps and bulges that nature cruelly allots to those who have tasted of the sweets of life.

I had never lifted a dumb-bell in my life excepting once years ago when I took a girl out into the country and had to carry her across a stream. But I was ready for the great adventure, come what may.

Mr. Sweeney—that wasn't his name—took me into his private office and immediately wheeled out some apparatus that looked strangely familiar. Bless my old rusty bones if it wasn't my boon companions, the blood-pressure gauge and the stethoscope. "Don't waste your time, Sweeney," I said. "You don't have to go over all that stuff again. I've had everything done a dozen times and my organs are O.K. I can stand anything. I'm willing to sign a paper releasing you from all responsibility if I drop dead during my exercises. My heart and lungs and stomach and kidneys and elbows are fine. You don't even have to scrape carbon."

He reluctantly wheeled the machinery back into





I had never lifted a dumb-bell in my life excepting once years ago when I took a girl out into the country and had to carry her across a stream.

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a corner. Then he led me over to a table and opened a book containing magazine and newspaper clippings telling about the miraculous cures he had accomplished. One glowing report stated he had taken three or four feet off Babe Ruth's waist-line and made it possible for him to buy ready-made pants. Another account brought to light the fact that a Wall Street broker went all to pieces from the strain of making twelve million dollars and was about to throw himself off the top of Williamsburg Bridge when Sweeney happened to be strolling past with a medicine ball in his hand. He threw the medicine ball to the nervous wreck and the distraught man threw it back for the want of nothing better to do. The two of them threw the ball back and forth violently for five or ten minutes until the broker worked up a perspiration and a new interest in life. Sweeney escorted him to the gymnasium. That was only four months ago. To-day that man not only is enjoying his twelve millions but does riveting on big buildings during his spare time and rocks the great sea monster to sleep when Barnum & Bailey's circus is in town.

I asked Sweeney if he got most of his clients by hovering around bridges with a medicine ball under his arm. "Oh, no," he replied, pointing to an account of his experience with a lighthouse keeper who

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was in bad shape on account of the sedentary nature of his work. It went on to say that Sweeney was taking one of his customary forty-mile swims off Nantucket one day when he heard strange noises coming from the lighthouse. He swam alongside and saw the lighthouse keeper making wild gesticulations like one fighting off mortal enemies, and yelling "Boo!" Upon questioning the poor fellow it did not take Sweeney long to see that he had gone completely goofy from staying so long in one place, all by himself. From his strange mutterings it seems he thought he was a piece of antique furniture and was fighting off small loathsome creatures who were trying to fill him with worm holes to make him more valuable.

Sweeney hit him over the head with an Indian club—he always carried a set of Indian clubs with him in case of such an emergency—strapped him to his own back and swam with him to the gymnasium. Suffice it to say that to-day the lighthouse keeper is the happiest man in the world. He not only has regained his health but he has a group of sixteen Tiller girls with him constantly to dance to the rhythm of the waves beating upon the rocks below. He is never lonesome any more.

Sweeney was indeed a miracle man. He pointed to a magazine article giving the details of how he led



He not only regained his health but he has a group of Tiller Girls with him constantly to dance to the rhythm of the waves beating upon the rocks below.

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a well-known movie actor out of the valley of despond. It seems the great flicker ham had been drinking heavily, had washed up three or four wives, had been battling with the income tax authorities and was run down generally. He went to the most expensive specialists in the country but they could do nothing for him. He was at the end of his rope. He even let his wardrobe dwindle down to forty shirts and thirty-seven pairs of shoes. He lost interest in everything—even himself. When he lost interest in himself his friends knew it was serious. They wrote to President Hoover, Ambassador Dawes, Owen Young, Will Rogers and Jimmy Walker, and asked them what was to be done. They all sent back the same identical answer, "Tell it to Sweeney."

So they did. They wheeled him into the gymnasium on a tea wagon. He was very low. Sweeney took one look at him and said, "It's a cinch." Then he bent over and yelled into the prostrate actor's ear, "You can have \$10,000 a week, write your own scenarios, have your own bungalow on the lot and work when you feel like it." The broken celebrity sat up and reached for a fountain pen with which to sign the contract. Quick as a flash Sweeney shoved a dumb-bell into his hand and started counting, "One, two, one, two, one, two." The patient easily fell into



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the rhythm. Before he could realize what he was doing he had a dumb-bell in the other hand and was actually going through the exercise routine. Sweeney believes in the old theory that a dumb-bell in the hand is worth two in the street.

Needless to say the movie goof after three months of regular training in the gymnasium was his old sweet self again and was able to autograph his photographs without the slightest trace of a quiver. Sweeney explained to me that each individual case presented a different problem and needed different treatment. I wondered what class I came under.

The first part of my treatment was to make out a check for two hundred and fifty dollars. I was afraid to ask just how much time this amount was to cover. I did not wish to appear gymnasium conscious. I thought of the emergency that might occur should I die before I had used up my two hundred dollars' worth. Somehow the atmosphere suggested that this was a gentleman's game and questions about terms were slightly out of place. The whole thing was more like a mother-and-child affair where everything was done in a family spirit. I expected to see some song pluggers emerge from the little dressing booths singing their mammy songs.

I tried to wear my gymnasium costume without

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any show of self-consciousness. It was the first time I had ever appeared in the garb of an athlete and I had a sneaking suspicion that I looked terrible. When I timidly showed myself in the passageway outside the dressing room Sweeney turned me over to one of his smiling, gentle-souled, bulging-muscled lieutenants. He wore white trousers but the upper part of his body was pretty well exposed, showing a fine development of brawn and muscle. His general appearance convinced me that he was not the type of person who argued long over anything. He simply said, in a high tenor voice, "Come this way."

His gracious but final manner suggested more the keeper than the gymnasium instructor. There was no other word to express my state of being at this moment than "inmate." I would have responded "present" if someone had yelled "Number 1326." But inmate, delinquent, or patient, there I was, a Spartan gladiator ready for the tournament of nerves.

We went into the gymnasium proper where big business sheds its aura of dignity and becomes a prey to liniment and adhesive tape. Each one of the ten or twelve health seekers had his individual instructor. Some were waving dumb-bells, others were lying on mattresses lifting their limbs and bodies to the accompaniment of puffs and grunts, while others were toss-



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ing the medicine ball from different stances all of which seemed very uncomfortable. Sweeney whispered into the ear of my male nurse. I don't know whether he said to go easy or make it snappy. It was all the same to me. When you consider that it had always been a great strain for me to lift my arm when I hailed a taxi you can imagine my feelings when my keeper placed the inevitable iron dumb-bells in my hands, stood facing me and said, "Now, do everything I do. One, two, one, two, one, two, one, two." It really didn't seem so bad when I got started. After about ten minutes of bending and waving I was still alive and rather pleased with myself. I was ready to say, "Gee, that was great. I'll put on my things now and be back Thursday."

But my teacher told me that now that we were warmed up we would soon get going. He led me to a row of mattresses spread out on the floor. Most of them were occupied by the athletic remains of what were once men of affairs. They were throwing their legs over their heads and tying themselves into sailors' knots. A ball player got tangled up with a broker and it took two of the assistants to re-assort their arms and legs. A coal merchant got so in the habit of lifting his knees back and forth against his chest he couldn't stop. The rest of his body was exhausted



They were throwing their legs over their heads and tying themselves into sailors' knots.

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but his knees were still full of life. He pleaded with them to stop moving, calling them endearing terms like "Alice" and "Florence." Finally Sweeney himself had to knock the poor fellow cold to get his knees quiet.

"I'll start you light," said my instructor. "This being the first time I'll just let you do the pendulum, the cocktail shaker, and the accordion." He grabbed my left foot and pressed it against my nose. He pushed my right foot up against the small of my back. He worked both feet back and forth against my eyebrows in perfect rhythm until the squeaks in my bones made a crooning sound like Rudy Vallee singing, "Lover Come Back to Me." All of a sudden everything went black and when I came to I was looking out from under my left arm pit. He had taken me unawares and given me the pretzel twist. I finished with a double overhand stroke to get out of my own perspiration and then he said, "Now, you can rest." He turned me over like a fried egg and wrapped me in a blanket. I took a side glance along the row of victims beside me. Many others were lying on their backs wrapped in blankets, too. The gentle, rolling topography of their stomachs gave the effect of the cooling sand dunes of Southampton, Long Island, and I fell asleep.

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I must have said something in my sleep about the killing I made in General Electric because when I awoke Sweeney himself was standing over me asking how I felt. He told my tutor to put me through a few paces with the medicine ball and then let me off for the day. I don't know what a medicine ball weighs under normal conditions, but when I started tossing the leather projectile back and forth I realized what a tough job Atlas has had standing around all these years holding up the world. Every time that ball hit my chest I was convinced it was stuffed with broken battleships that were junked by the Treaty of Versailles. The particular ball that I was using had a few cruisers thrown in for extra measure. I used to kick when my wife, wanting to change the arrangement of furniture in the living room, asked me to move the piano. Moving the piano was like passing the salt compared to tossing the medicine ball. The only sense I could see in this weird, degenerate form of exercise was that if I ever lost my cunning in my own profession I could qualify for a job tossing bums out of speakeasies.

It was with a feeling of tremendous relief that I lay down on the rubbing table for a refreshing body massage. The rubber had the same smiling indulgent personality as the gym professor. I was too exhausted

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to suspect anything on this score and lay back thinking of the glowing, healthful, muscular joy the future had in store for me. Then it happened. "Slap" went a big calloused hand on my chest. "Klunk" went a set of brawny knuckles on my neck. "Bang, sock, bam" came the blows on my waist, arms, legs, and ribs. Alcohol splashed in my eyes and mouth until I was drunk. I was all red. When I finally struggled to my feet I was bent in half and looked like a firecracker that had already exploded. The masseur pointed to a shriveled individual who stood beside me and whispered, "See that guy. He is worth thirty millions and is seventy-six years old. He hasn't missed a day here in three years." I thought he had aged rather slowly considering the course of treatment. I had taken only one dose and felt ninety-nine.

The smiling custodian of the showers—everybody seemed to be smiling but me—asked me if I would like a Scotch "blizzard." Before I could answer he turned the hose on me and knocked out the little strength I had left in my body. It was more than a Scotch blizzard. It was a Japanese typhoon and a Caribbean tornado.

Fortunately I still retained my olfactory sense and I was brought back to consciousness by the smell of



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something cooking. I looked into the next compartment and saw a bald head sticking out of a square cabinet. The head seemed to be lighted indirectly like the dome of the Capitol in Washington and I must admit that the effect was somewhat pleasing to the eye. The face had an expression of courageous resignation. I don't know whether the body was being broiled, roasted or fried, but the aroma suggested either stock broker au gratin or real estate operator en casserole. Sweeney snuggled up to my side and said, still smilingly, "I won't let you sit in the electric cabinet to-day. You've had enough for the first time. I think it is better to leave that enjoyment as something to look forward to." I kissed him for those kind words and left him standing bewildered as I ducked into the dressing room and started to dress.

All around me were men of all sizes, ages and shapes, dressing and singing. They had finished their exercise and were ready for a glorious dinner and a wild night. They said between their snatches of melody, "Gee, I feel great," "I had a wonderful workout to-day," "I conquered the jackknife bend to-day," "I played six games of handball and don't even feel it," . . . "Wow, this is great," and so forth. They were glowing with health and I was a wreck. Sweeney watched me struggle with my socks



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and said, "You did fine for the first time. In three months I'll have you biting nails. See that fellow over there?" He pointed to a dark, sunken-chested individual who looked like the pictures they put in pamphlets asking for funds for starving Hungarians. "Well, he came here six months ago a total wreck. He was so shaky his friends actually carried him in here. He had seen every specialist in town and was getting worse all the time. He was a nervous wreck. Look at him now. He is just going into the handball court for a fast game and is as calm and cheerful as the Prince of Wales. He is doing better work than he ever did in his life. He was afraid he couldn't find time for this. Now he wouldn't miss a day in the gymnasium if his mother was dying."

The fellow's looks gave me fresh hope. I knew I could never look that bad. I thought I was in awful shape but compared to him I was Tarzan of the Apes. No matter how this gymnasium course ravished my soul and body I could never achieve the texture of a dried herring. If I died in the attempt to give this highly recommended form of health-building a chance, I would never look as cadaverous as this exhibit of six months' training. I owe him a vote of thanks. He was the innocent cause of helping me to carry on.

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When I got home, my wife sent the children out of the room and said, "You've been drinking some of that awful gin. You can hardly stand up."

"You're wrong, dear," I came back with the fine sense of righteousness one feels when one has the truth on his side. "You see before you the result of a few hours' work in the gymnasium. It cost me a lot of money to find out that I need exercise and I am spending a little more to find out if the man who told me I needed exercise is right. Don't pass any snap judgment. Wait for a few weeks and see what happens." I think she believed me because I fell back on the couch and went to sleep. She knew if her first conjecture had been right I would have told her to put on her things and get ready for a big night.

When I awoke the next day I was as stiff as King Tut. It took me three quarters of an hour to shave. I barely had enough strength to open my egg. I entertained grave doubts as to the wisdom of it all but said nothing. Now at least I knew why I felt so awful. That was a step forward. The first fellow I met downtown started right in with one of those things that always open with, "In the morning I get up promptly at seven-thirty, take a few setting-up exercises, put on the dressing gown that happens to suit my mood and eat a light breakfast consisting of

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so and so and so and so. Then my man lays out my clothes for the day while I play a few selections on the flute. Sometimes I have my personal masseur come in and give me a Swedish. But as a rule I leave that till four in the afternoon when I get to the gym. At eight-fourteen when I am fully dressed I walk eight miles through the park. My car meets me at the corner of so and so and so and so. I can do two hours' work in one on account of my perfect coördination. Promptly at three-fifty-two in the afternoon, I tell Miss Glutz to finish up the few important things left over, and I take a taxi uptown to the gym. It's the only real gym in town. When I reach the gym I say 'Hello,' take off my coat, take a drink of water, scratch my nose, weigh myself—" and so on *ad nauseum*.

I was dying to describe my own day which I knew was at least as interesting as his but I didn't have the nerve. Somehow I felt it was too unimportant to even inflict on a fellow bore. I wasn't quite sure how long my day would follow its present schedule. If I looked like I felt, my day was a total loss anyway.

The following day I staggered back to the gym and amidst a sea of those ever-smiling faces I went through the same torture as I did on my first appearance, only I played two games of handball and sat

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in the electric incinerator. Now, it's all right for Kreisler to play the violin and Schmeling to fight and Lindbergh to fly and Pavlova to dance. They all have done it before. In fact, they have been doing it for years. But for a man who has grown to be over forty without ever wearing a pair of gymnasium trunks to suddenly start trying for right tackle on a college football team doesn't seem right. In fact, it isn't right.

I went to the torture chamber every other day for three weeks. Each time I went they opened the throttle a little wider. When they saw that I survived the rigors of the first few weeks they looked upon me as a hardened veteran. They did not let me out of the electric box until I was well done. They did not stop tossing me the medicine ball until my front elevation was dotted with golf traps and bunkers. They gave me the heaviest dumb-bells in the place. When I lifted them they had to chisel my heels out of the floor. The rubber gave me the half-Nelson and strangle hold and wrestled me to a fall. They paired me off with the champion handball player of the gym who kept me playing until my hands hung at my sides like a couple of ancient valises. They called out the fire department to give me a shower.

Organically I wasn't any better and I wasn't any

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worse. I was simply dead tired. After my workout I could rest in any position. I relaxed in the subway with four umbrellas sticking in my eye and a Bronx politician at my side taking home a bundle of herring. I fell over a toy aeroplane when I entered the house and I simply lay there until some of the guests started to throw cigarette butts in my mouth thinking I was a decorative ash tray. I slept like a babe while all the husbands and wives were fighting at bridge.

When I felt the numbness creeping upon me to such an extent that it became an effort for me to work I knew exactly what to do. I simply stopped going to the gymnasium. I stopped taking exercise. I determined not to fool myself any longer. There were a lot of places where I didn't belong and the gymnasium was one. While some people can weave rugs, others make mayonnaise, others hunt lions in Africa and still others sit on flag poles, my life had not been exactly a failure for the want of doing any of these things. By the same token I have never grown morose over the absence of Indian clubs, dumb-bells or medicine balls in my life.

Maybe I am still swallowing an occasional capsule of air and my nerves are still jumpy once in a while. But I am gradually rounding into shape without the

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aid of any regular exercise and I can keep awake at night when I see three aces in front of me. Sweeney really misses me a lot because he has sent me telegrams and letters and post cards. But there are still plenty of fellows to come breezing out of his place full of the joy of life. So we're all getting a break.





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